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TITLE OF THE INVENTION

BINGO GAME USING SPECIFIED BOARD AND METHOD OF PLAYING

[0001] This application claims priority to applicants' copending U.S. Provisional Patent Application Serial No. 60/443,577 titled "BINGO GAME USING SPECIFIED BOARD AND METHOD OF PLAYING" filed January 30, 2003. The entirety of that provisional patent application is incorporated herein by reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Field of the Invention

[0002] The present invention relates to the field of games, and in particular to an interactive player game involving "Bingo-like" play and amenable to play on television or a machine, including a slot machine.

Background of the Technology

[0003] It is known in the art to provide entertaining games, such as "Jeopardy" and "Wheel of Fortune", each of which are produced by Merv Griffin Enterprises of Beverly Hills, California, for the entertainment industry. Other home games, such as Monopoly® and Clue, which are manufactured by Hasbro, Inc., of Pawtucket, Rhode Island, and others, have had a wide berth of popularity. Many of these games have been in the market place for many years and have lost some of their earlier attraction.

[0004] There is constantly a need for new attractions in the games market, for television, as well as home and casino use.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0005] It is an advantage of the present invention to meet this need, as well as others, by providing a fresh approach to one of the world's most popular games: Bingo. In one embodiment of the game of the present invention, a master of ceremonies (MC) or other person or method presents a panel of players with questions. The questions are answered, prizes are awarded, and ultimately, a winner is determined based on who completes a "Bingo" (or other word, phrase, or set of symbols) line on a predetermined Bingo-type board.

[0006] It is a further advantage of one embodiment of the present invention to provide a predetermined board having cube or other appropriately shaped turnable messages that include a beginning side or view, a side or view that offers a prize, and a side or view that fills in a "Bingo" row when the set of questions are answered correctly.

[0007] It is yet another advantage of an embodiment of the present invention provide a "Bingo" ball drop machine to drop one ball at a time to determine which square on the board will be played for next. It is another advantage of one embodiment of the present invention to provide balls marked with special numbers, markers, or illustrations to correspond with predetermined squares on the special "Bingo" board. It is another advantage of one embodiment of the present invention to provide that the turnable messages are marked with random amounts of cash or other prizes.

[0008] It is yet another advantage of an embodiment of the present invention that players are able to accumulate prizes and cash by answering questions for each square that is picked at random by a "Bingo" ball drop machine, thus filling in the board of the game.

5 **[0009]** It is another advantage of an embodiment of the present invention that the player that answers the most questions and is awarded the most cash and prizes may not necessary end up winning the game. In an embodiment of the present invention, the winner is the player who answers the last question to fill in a "Bingo" row, column, or diagonal.

10 **[00010]** An embodiment of the present invention comprises of a "Bingo" style game, with auxiliary features proving the opportunity to win cash and prizes. The game, referred to in one embodiment as "American Bingo," is playable as a live television game or other form of commercial entertainment, as a home game, or as a video, computer-based, slot machine, or other automated game.

15 **[00011]** In one embodiment, the present invention includes a method for at least one player from a panel of players to play a "Bingo" game with a "Bingo" board, the board having predetermined cash and prizes, and for at least one player from the panel of players to participate in the winning of the game by answering questions. Embodiments of the present invention further include a method for playing a television type game, with representations of a bingo board, the board predetermined with cash and prizes, and for 20 at least one player from a panel of players to play a bingo game with the bingo board and for at least one player from a panel to participate in the winning of the game by answering questions.

[00012] Another embodiment of the present invention includes a method for playing a home bingo game, with representations of a bingo board, the board predetermined with cash and prizes, and for at least one player from a panel of players to play a bingo game with the bingo board and for at least one player from a panel to participate in the

5   winning of the game by answering questions.

[00013] Yet another embodiment of the present invention includes a device for a player to play a bingo game with representations of a bingo board, the board predetermined with cash and prizes, and for at least one player from a panel of players to play a bingo game with the bingo board and for at least one player from a panel to

10   participate in the winning of the game by answering questions.

[00014] Another embodiment of the present invention includes play amenable to use with a slot machine. In this embodiment, one or more reel slots of the slot machine are marked with the winning symbol, such as the word "Bingo." When the slots produce a winning combination, as known in the art (e.g., three Bingos, one or more Bingos in

15   combination with bars), a screen or other display is activated, showing a prize winning procedure, such as a ball drop and a random result. In one variation, the prize winning also produces the filling of one or more portions of a matrix, so as to progress toward completing, for example, a row, column, or diagonal of a Bingo board representation. Upon completion of, for example, a row column, or diagonal, a bonus or other prize is

20   optionally awarded.

[00015] Additional advantages and novel features of the invention will be set forth in part in the description that follows, and in part will become more apparent to those in the art upon examination of the following or upon learning by practice of the invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE FIGURES

[00016]   In the drawings:

[00017]   FIG. 1 is an overhead view of the players, host, the gaming board, and bingo ball drop machine for use, for example, in live television play of a game, in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention;

[00018]   FIG. 2 depicts various components for use in electronic play of the game, in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention;

[00019]   FIG. 3 presents components for electronic play of the game via a network, in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention;

[00020]   FIG. 4 contains a block diagram of various computer system components for implementation of a game via a processor, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention; and

[00021]   FIGs. 5A and 5B show a flow diagram of an example method of play of the game, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[00022]   One embodiment of the present invention includes a bingo game that provides participating players with a chance to obtain cash and/or other prizes by responding to queries (e.g., answering questions) that correspond to the squares of a bingo board or other matrix of selections, with the player who answers the question that completes a bingo row, column, or diagonal winning the game.

[00023] In accordance with one exemplary embodiment of the present invention, play is conducted using a standard bingo ball drop machine, and a matrix of selections, such as a Bingo board having cross-sectional locations (also interchangeably referred to herein as "squares") that denote different prizes. For example, in one embodiment,

5   the board has a square cross-sectional shape, that includes 25 separate sections, five down and five across with the word Bingo across the top to correspond to the columns, and the numbers one (1) through five (5) down the sides to correspond to the rows. A "free" or otherwise universally player usable square is optionally marked in the center of the board. Other variations can be used as deemed appropriate.

10   **[00024]** In one embodiment, the game includes specially marked balls that designate specific squares on the board or other matrix. Each participating player is seated facing the matrix, as described further below. The host (e.g., person that asks the questions; also interchangeably referred to herein as the master of ceremonies or MC) can be standing at a podium on either side of the special game board opposite the

15   players. Another helper may be located at the ball drop machine so as to display the ball that drops and designates which square (selection) the players play for.

[00025] The game may also be played with representations of any of the features described. For example, the game is playable in an electronic or partially electronic manner using a terminal, such as a personal computer, microcomputer, minicomputer,

20   mainframe computer, or other device having a processor and display, such as an electronic hand-held game device, for which representative images of a board and individual squares, questions and answers, and credit for correct answers are displayed on a screen via a graphical user interface (GUI). The game is also playable in

conjunction with performance of selected functions on a network, such as the Internet or an intranet or using, for example, a slot machine or other device, including use with other variations of play amenable to the type of machine and preferences or limitations for that machine.

5   **[00026]**   In one embodiment, prior to play of the game, matrix (board) is set up with random prizes, such as cash values, trips, cars, or other prizes, which are associated with the individual squares of the board or other selections relating to the matrix. In one embodiment, each selection in the matrix begins with a blank display (e.g., the board includes turnable cube-shaped information "squares" (or other shapes), each having a

10   blank side or a side with symbols on it that is initially displayed to the players). When the corresponding ball drops identifying a particular selection, a prize is revealed (e.g., the square is turned to a prize display). The panel of players then await a competitive attempt to answer the query (e.g., each player holds a buzzing device and prepares to answer questions either given in live play by an MC or on a card or other video device).

15   **[00027]**   In play with multiple players, a board, and an MC, typically the game proceeds with the MC asking that the first ball be dropped from the special bingo drop machine. Each ball corresponds to one cross-sectional location ("square") on the bingo board or other matrix, such as B1, N2. After the location has been called out or designated, the square corresponding to the ball dropped is turned to reveal the prize

20   won for that square.

[00028]   The MC then presents to the panel of players a query (e.g., reads out loud a random question or question assigned to the square), and the player that hits their buzzer first receives the first opportunity to answer the question and win the prize that

has been shown on the square. In one variation, should the first responding player answer correctly, the prize is won by that player. If the player responds incorrectly, the remaining players have the opportunity to answer, with the remaining player that hits their buzzer first having the chance and so on. If the question remains unanswered or

5   is only answered incorrectly, the ball goes back into the hopper and the game continues without the square being assigned to any player.

[00029]   The game continues in this fashion, with the questions being answered and the prizes being awarded to the panel of players. When the board reaches the point where all but one square on any row horizontally, vertically, or, optionally

10   diagonally, has been won, the game is set for a player to win (referred to in some embodiments as obtaining a "Bingo"). The win is accomplish when the ball drops that corresponds to the single vacant remaining square on the row, column, or diagonal, and the MC asks a question that corresponds to that square. The player properly answering the question, and thus winning the square, also wins the game and, for example, has

15   the opportunity to continue playing another game.

[00030]   In one embodiment of the present invention, the game can be won by any player, whether that player has or has not answered the most questions, so long as that player completes a row, column, or optionally a diagonal (e.g., obtains a "Bingo"). In some embodiments, non-winning players keep the prizes that they have won during

20   play; in other embodiments, non-winning players do not keep prizes.

[00031]   Embodiments of the present invention also include continued play into additional games that include special bonus features, such as multiplying the amount of prize or cash the player may have won or already won (e.g., first game has maximum

prize of $1000; second game has maximum prize of $5,000). Special bonus features can be added as appropriate.

[00032]   Other embodiments of the present invention include play amenable to use with a slot machine or other device having particular limitations or preferences. In embodiments for use with slot machines, for example, in a first round portion, one or more reel slots of the slot machine are marked with the winning symbol, such as the word "Bingo," or another device is provided for producing a random result. When the slots produce a winning combination, as known in the art (e.g., three Bingos, one or more Bingos in combination with bars aligning, or other preselected result), the game proceeds to a second round portion. In the second round portion, a screen or other display is activated, showing a prize winning procedure, such as a ball drop and a random result. In one variation, the prize winning also produces the filling of one or more portions of a matrix, so as to progress toward completing, for example, a row, column, or diagonal of a Bingo board representation. Upon completion of, for example, a row column, or diagonal, a bonus or other prize is optionally awarded.

[00033]   References will now be made in detail to embodiments of the present invention, examples of which are illustrated in the accompanying drawings.

[00034]   FIG. 1 is an overhead view of the players, MC, the gaming board and ball drop machine of the game, in accordance one embodiment of the present invention. The same similar modified features are also usable in embodiments of the present invention designed for home use. FIG. 1 shows and embodiment of the game as played with one to three players 1, 2, 3 and the MC 4 with a ball machine 5 and gaming board 6.

[00035]   FIG. 2 depicts the components for electronic play of the game in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention. As shown in FIG. 2, in this embodiment, a player 20 plays at a terminal 21, such as a personal computer, a minicomputer, a microcomputer, a main frame computer, or other device having a

5   display, processor and GUI, including a hand-held electronic game, or other device, such as a slot machine.

[00036]   FIG. 3 presents components for electronic play of the game via a network, such as the Internet or an intranet, in accordance with another emobodiment of the present invention. As shown in FIG. 3, a player 30 plays at a terminal 31, such as a

10   personal computer, a minicomputer, a microcomputer, a main frame computer, or other device having a display and processor. The terminal 30, is connected 32, 34, for example, via wired, wireless, or fiber optic coupling, and a network 33, such as the Internet or an intranet, to a server 35, such as personal computer, a minicomputer, a microcomputer, a main frame computer, or other device having a processor.

15   [00037]   The present invention may be implemented using hardware, software or a combination thereof and may be implemented in one or more computer systems or other processing systems. In one embodiment, the invention is directed toward one or more computer systems capable of carrying out the functionality described herein. An example of such a computer system 200 is shown in FIG. 4.

20   [00038]   Computer system 200 includes one or more processors, such as processor 204. The processor 204 is connected to a communication infrastructure 206 (e.g., a communications bus, cross-over bar, or network). Various software embodiments are described in terms of this exemplary computer system. After reading

this description, it will become apparent to a person skilled in the relevant art(s) how to implement the invention using other computer systems and/or architectures.

[00039]   Computer system 200 can include a display interface 202 that forwards graphics, text, and other data from the communication infrastructure 206 (or from a frame buffer not shown) for display on the display unit 230. Computer system 200 also includes a main memory 208, preferably random access memory (RAM), and may also include a secondary memory 210. The secondary memory 210 may include, for example, a hard disk drive 212 and/or a removable storage drive 214, representing a floppy disk drive, a magnetic tape drive, an optical disk drive, etc. The removable storage drive 214 reads from and/or writes to a removable storage unit 218 in a well known manner. Removable storage unit 218, represents a floppy disk, magnetic tape, optical disk, etc., which is read by and written to removable storage drive 214. As will be appreciated, the removable storage unit 218 includes a computer usable storage medium having stored therein computer software and/or data.

[00040]   In alternative embodiments, secondary memory 210 may include other similar devices for allowing computer programs or other instructions to be loaded into computer system 200. Such devices may include, for example, a removable storage unit 222 and an interface 220. Examples of such may include a program cartridge and cartridge interface (such as that found in video game devices), a removable memory chip (such as an erasable programmable read only memory (EPROM), or programmable read only memory (PROM)) and associated socket, and other removable storage units 222 and interfaces 220, which allow software and data to be transferred from the removable storage unit 222 to computer system 200.

[00041] Computer system 200 may also include a communications interface 224. Communications interface 224 allows software and data to be transferred between computer system 200 and external devices. Examples of communications interface 224 may include a modem, a network interface (such as an Ethernet card), a communications port, a Personal Computer Memory Card International Association (PCMCIA) slot and card, etc. Software and data transferred via communications interface 224 are in the form of signals 228, which may be electronic, electromagnetic, optical or other signals capable of being received by communications interface 224. These signals 228 are provided to communications interface 224 via a communications path (e.g., channel) 226. This path 226 carries signals 228 and may be implemented using wire or cable, fiber optics, a telephone line, a cellular link, a radio frequency (RF) link and/or other communications channels. In this document, the terms "computer program medium" and "computer usable medium" are used to refer generally to media such as a removable storage drive 214, a hard disk installed in hard disk drive 212, and signals 228. These computer program products provide software to the computer system 200. The invention is directed to such computer program products.

[00042] Computer programs (also referred to as computer control logic) are stored in main memory 208 and/or secondary memory 210. Computer programs may also be received via communications interface 224. Such computer programs, when executed, enable the computer system 200 to perform the features of the present invention, as discussed herein. In particular, the computer programs, when executed, enable the processor 204 to perform the features of the present invention. Accordingly, such computer programs represent controllers of the computer system 200.

[00043]   In an embodiment where the invention is implemented using software, the software may be stored in a computer program product and loaded into computer system 200 using removable storage drive 214, hard drive 212, or communications interface 224. The control logic (software), when executed by the processor 204,

5   causes the processor 204 to perform the functions of the invention as described herein. In another embodiment, the invention is implemented primarily in hardware using, for example, hardware components, such as application specific integrated circuits (ASICs). Implementation of the hardware state machine so as to perform the functions described herein will be apparent to persons skilled in the relevant art(s).

10   [00044]   In yet another embodiment, the invention is implemented using a combination of both hardware and software.

[00045]   FIGs. 5a and 5B show a flow diagram of an example method of play for the present invention that includes winning of prizes, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. As shown in FIGs. 5A and 5B, play of the game begins when

15   the specially designated ball drops from the special bingo ball drop machine or other process for selecting a cross-sectional matrix location 50. The balls can be marked in numerous ways as long as they correspond to the number of squares on the board. The marked ball that drops will then be called out and the corresponding square on the bingo board will turn, facing out to reveal the prize to be awarded, or the prize otherwise

20   indicated 51. At this point the MC (master of ceremonies) will then ask a predetermined question from a stack of questions or other process for query occurs 52.

[00046]   Players who believe that they know the correct answer, hit a buzzer or in some other way let the MC that they know they are ready to answer and are determined

to be the first to answer the question or otherwise indicate intent to answer 53. A determination is then made whether the first responding player answered correctly 54. If the player answers correctly, the player accumulates the prize 55 (e.g., cube in board turns to indicate square completed, and player has prize added to total). The game

5   continues 56 until a bingo row is completed 57, that being a row with all squares turned in a horizontal, vertical or diagonal line. The player that fills in the last square of the Bingo wins the game.

[00047]   As further shown in FIGs. 5A and 5B, if it is determined 54 that a player does not answer correctly, optionally, the other players have the opportunity to hit their

10   buzzers and the first one of them to signal has the opportunity to answer 58. A determination is then made for the next responding player as to whether the answer is correct 59. Should one of the remaining players answer the question correctly 60, the game continues 56. If none of the remaining players answers correctly or no one knows the answer, the ball, for example, if used, is returned to the hopper 61 and the game

15   continues 62.

[00048]   As shown in FIGs. 5A and 5B, the game continues unto a bingo is made. The player that is awarded the last square that completes a bingo, wins the game regardless of how many squares they have already won. Alternatively, the winner may be determined to be the player who has won the most value in prizes, or the most

20   squares, or a combination the above.

[00049]   Additional games can be played with the addition of numerous bonus features and prizes to make the game exciting for the players, as in different bonus

multipliers or special prizes could be attached to individual squares that increase the

value of the players winnings. Grand prizes and/or awards could be added as needed.

[00050]   Example embodiments of the present invention have now been described

in accordance with the above advantages. It will be appreciated that these examples

5   are merely illustrations of the invention. Many variations and modifications will be

apparent to those skilled in the art of the games.